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State of the City Mayor Kitty Piercy

Eugene 2010

Welcome to Eugene 2010. It's good to see you here tonight. It's time for us to celebrate the end of a tough year and "turning the corner" to this New Year.

It took "people power" to keep moving forward in these hard times. We had that - our neighborhoods, our volunteers, our activists, and our partners.

The leadership and deep commitment of our community was evident in 2009 with so many talented people working together, day after day, meeting after meeting, for public benefit. Moreover, we relied on partnerships that extend well beyond Eugene, to other cities, other institutions and agencies.

We learned we are truly "better together."

While I don't want to linger on all the challenges we faced, they were definitely big. Last year, the recession worsened and we were among the hardest hit in the country. Our unemployment, hunger, crime, and homelessness rates soared. Our budget shortfall expanded and tax returns shrank.

We pitched in and tightened our belts. Council, staff, partners and volunteers pulled together to keep steady and on course. The economy was our number one focus for 2009.

ECONOMY WAS NUMBER 1

We worked to take charge of our destiny. We were sure that by working together, we could harness some of our creativity, educational assets, and immense public will to protect our natural resources, ensure social equity and build economic prosperity – the triple bottom line. We built on the foundation we've carefully put in place over the last few years.

In 2009, we delivered a three-pronged economic strategy.

The three-pronged strategy:

One: We brought federal stimulus dollars to our region.

Two: We protected our local businesses.

Three: With our partners, we strategized and planned how we can emerge from this recession and be ready to go.

Stimulus

Let's talk about those federal stimulus dollars for a moment. In our metro area, over \$101 million dollars was awarded to cities, the county, schools, educational and research institutions, non-profits, utilities and our transit authority.

Funds were received for a diversity of local projects including transportation, public safety, housing, scholarships, health centers, electric vehicles, training nursing assistants, tobacco prevention in middle schools, drug abuse prevention, school readiness, and domestic violence prevention. By far, the greatest amount went to the University of Oregon for research in numerous areas ranging from language to migration, from zebra fish to global warming.

Eugene received more than \$10 million dollars to construct bicycle paths and a bridge at Delta Ponds, for energy efficiency projects, pedestrian and bike facilities at our train depot, pavement preservation, neighborhood stabilization and community development programs, homeless prevention, youth employment opportunities and a justice grant for our police.

These funds bring jobs, business growth and opportunities in our region. They also lay the foundation for the future.

Saving Jobs

The second strategy was to support the businesses and jobs we have. City fee increases were deferred, permit reviews were fast-tracked, same-day and Saturday residential inspections were put in place, automatic three-year extensions were given for certain land use applications, and business loan funds were increased by \$320,000.

The city loaned money to such great local companies as Green Gear, Ninkasi Brewing Company, and the Inn at 5th Street Market. These made a difference!

Economic Summit

The third strategy was a Joint Elected Officials regional economic summit involving over 300 participants.

The cities of Eugene and Springfield, Lane County, and other partners worked together to plan for a vibrant economy aligned with our area's assets and values, with the goal of good paying jobs and high quality of life.

In early 2010, the Joint Elected Officials will meet again to use the findings of the summit and move economic planning forward.

Important, too, to this economic discussion will be the completion of our required buildable land supply inventory (ECLA) and how we address the future direction of our community. We intend to have this pivotal policy discussion collaboratively and productively, avoiding polarizing presumptions and politics. To prevent sprawl, we are going to have to live more densely and protect the character of our valuable, inner core neighborhoods. We've seen some deterioration in these neighborhoods already, so the timing here is crucial.

Downtown Revitalization

A fourth, additional strategy was to move downtown revitalization forward. I feel like a broken record here, but my commitment is unerring. We deserve a downtown to be proud of. This requires a multifaceted approach that includes development, public safety and social services. It includes you.

Development

We've been successful in partnering with Lane Community College to fill the Sears pit. They plan a total investment of \$25 -35 million that is expected to produce several hundred construction jobs, 45 new permanent downtown jobs, and at least six job programs training 8,000 students a year. The LCC Downtown Center will prepare a workforce for the rapidly growing green jobs sector and provide a highly trained labor pool for green industries looking to locate in the area. Please let LCC know what a great thing this will be for Eugene.

A city party is due when this pit is finally plugged!

Eugene's Downtown Revitalization Loan program provided gap financing for critical projects such as Kesey Enterprise's purchase of the historic McDonald Building and Lord Leebrick's redevelopment of the west Broadway property. These projects are important in building our arts and entertainment district as a significant local economic resource and the cultural identity of our community.

Beam Development's rehabilitation of Centre Court made important progress. The remodeled building proposes to provide flexible "incubator" space for small businesses - a need we heard about in our recent Economic Summit. I give Beam Development and Brad Malsin every credit for being great partners and keeping this on track.

Other hopeful possibilities include the upcoming Peace Health Hospital revitalization in our campus area and a regional veterans' clinic in our downtown.

Public Safety

Public safety plays a vital role in our quality of life, economic future and downtown revitalization. This has been a year of ups and downs.

We're pleased to have our new Chief of Police, Pete Kerns sworn in and our new Independent Police Auditor Mark Gissiner hired, and have confidence that they will both help us move forward. Top on their list will be our city's taser policy and any changes that are needed.

The Public Safety System

Our tattered regional public safety system gained national attention this year. Limited county dollars meant fewer county jail beds and a revolving door for criminals. Additional jail beds have since opened, offering some temporary measure of relief and stimulus funds have helped meet some needs in the short-run. Unfortunately, ongoing system funding solutions haven't yet been found.

The county is legally responsible for prevention, intervention, treatment, judicial, incarceration and post-incarceration services, but they currently don't have the resources to pay for them.

We expect new directions from the county and look forward to the recommendations of a community committee led by Jean Tate and Dave Frohnmayer that is working on some "out of the box" solutions. We'll be supportive as they move forward.

City Services

At the city level we're addressing our public safety needs in new and innovative ways.

Chief Kerns initiated strategies to reduce car theft and other property crimes through targeted deployment and increased use of data. He has a task force focused on downtown-specific strategies.

He instituted additional crisis intervention trainings to ensure our officers have tools to deal effectively with people in crisis, including those with mental illness. This should help with a number of the behavioral issues in our downtown.

We appreciate the work of the Police Commission and Human Rights Commission as we work to create a safe environment for all who live here, no matter their circumstances.

Network Charter School youth are also part of our public safety solutions. We look to them for leadership and partnership. We understand that youth need good, safe places to go.

Once again, the Eugene Rotarians have stepped forward to help provide such places and we thank them. By supporting the transformation of Washington/Jefferson Park to a regional skating facility close to our downtown core, Rotarians will help displace some criminal activity, reinvigorate an ailing park and demonstrate to our youth that they matter. That's great partnership.

Increased positive activity in our downtown, increased numbers of officers, combined with help from neighbors, businesses, agencies and non-profits will be needed to solve all our public safety issues.

Fire and Emergency Services

Fire and Emergency Medical Services is another part of our public safety system that is strained and we're looking for solutions. Providing ambulance services remains far more expensive than the Medicare reimbursements received. We've taken steps to use a private company for transporting non-emergency patients in order to reduce costs. We are looking for other ways to address costs and to continue the high level of service our fire department provides.

A second issue is whether to merge the Springfield and Eugene fire departments to cut costs and improve efficiencies. These two departments have shown they work well together through their "Third Battalion," where each department steps in if the other is not available. It is a huge local control decision to merge two cities' core services.

Recommendations for both ambulance and fire services will move forward in the next year and we will need your input.

Social Services

One of the biggest questions we ask ourselves is how the community can better address homelessness. We've worked together successfully to better meet needs with public/private partnerships such as

Project Homeless Connect and the Thomas Eagan Warming Centers. We've recently affirmed through council resolution the rights of those with mental illness.

Yet, still before us is the need for housing for the chronically addicted and mentally ill. There's a lot of interest in additional shelter facilities. The city currently invests in affordable housing, support for existing shelters, permanent housing efforts and prevention work.

If we're serious about expanded shelter capacity, we'll need new public/ private resources, community leadership and stewardship.

Climate Change

As we moved to build economic capacity, we've been fully aware of the imperative for an increased response to finite resources and climate change. Our federal and state governments require us to ramp up our efforts to address this issue.

Staff responded this year with many innovations in sustainable practices that reduced material needs and greenhouse gases. These included warm-mix asphalt for street repair - thereby reducing emissions by 190 metric tons; recycling existing streets in place, and white-topping.

Parks staff reduced fuel consumption by a whopping 20%, conserving more than 3,700 gallons of fuel and the Wastewater division made a transition to a green fleet.

The city's Sustainability Commission recommended a community climate and energy action plan be developed. With the participation of many members of our community and our partners, this draft plan will be complete in August.

Climate change has enormous impacts and the Sustainability Commission also recommended a Food Security plan be developed. The scoping plan for this will be out in the next couple months.

We will continue to recognize public and private entities that adopt more sustainable practices through our Bold Steps Awards.

Our work here is extremely important and we are committed to doing our part in this community and region.

Infrastructure Investments

Public investments in our community paid off in 2009 and promises were kept.

Gas taxes, road bonds and stimulus dollars brought long-needed road repairs to fruition and more will occur this next year. Eugene invested \$16 million to fix streets in every part of the community. Our bond measure had a specific list of streets to be repaired and required a 12-member citizen oversight panel to verify those repairs. We'll continue to be accountable and good stewards in everything we do.

Our libraries were there in this recession, meeting our community's needs. Three million books were checked out. 7,300 children participated in our summer reading program. 800 free events served 40,000 participants, including help with job searches.

Our parks were also there in this recession, offering "stay-cation" activities for families. Parks bond funds and matching grants allowed renovations and developments in seven neighborhood parks. This simply would not have been possible without the sweat equity of the many neighborhood groups involved.

The Budget

All this work with partners to help in these tough times was truly remarkable. We dealt with a \$12 million dollar budget hole, kept our employees, provided services and made progress toward a sustainable budget. Our staff and manager did quite a job. We downsized through attrition, reduced our fleet and brought our legal staff in-house (as promised) to cut costs. Staff made many sacrifices and we thank them.

Eugene Counts

Despite our best efforts, we face yet another \$6-8 million dollar deficit in the general fund. We have invited the community into the discussion of what is most important. We call it *Eugene Counts*. I like this name because of its double meaning that what happens in our city does matter – it “counts” - and that we are accountable to show our citizens our progress on their behalf – an ongoing report card if you will.

As you have seen, we are looking for ways to provide the services our community wants, as well as the critical ones that are currently underfunded, such as public safety.

Shared responsibility

Some of the services are ours alone and some are shared with our partners.

Clean energy sources, water, and air matter, and they are shared responsibilities with EWEB and LRAPA.

A public transit system that efficiently and cleanly allows mobility of people and goods is essential and is a shared responsibility with LTD, and the state and federal governments.

Access to food and shelter, justice and civil rights is a shared responsibility. We will continue our strong partnership with the Human Rights Commission and other groups working to protect basic human rights.

Public Safety is definitely a shared responsibility and one that touches every facet of our lives.

Ensuring our children are educated, healthy and prepared for the future is a shared responsibility. Recently, council passed a resolution in support of measures 66 and 67 that help protect funding for all of these shared responsibilities. Please vote in January.

We have done much together and we have much more to do in the upcoming year. To wrap this up, I will mention some 2010 goals. As you know, many long-term ones continue and we are working with you on defining others.

2010 GOALS

1. We'll focus on an aggressive, regional economic development plan that includes bringing in stimulus funds, local business support, downtown revitalization, and turning our assets into job growth. We'll expand partnership opportunities with the University of Oregon to help achieve these goals.

2. We'll focus on a successful, collaborative policy discussion regarding our land supply needs that will provide understanding and broad support for Eugene's future growth and development.
3. We'll address land use and transportation planning as an integrated process. We'll follow through on the West Eugene Collaborative recommendations to achieve short-term traffic improvements in West Eugene and the technical analysis of the long-term vision that could transform the area.
4. We'll focus on filling the downtown pits with the collaboration of Lane Community College and Beam; supporting the growth of our downtown cultural district; and working on public safety and social service solutions. In my opinion, we have to look for ways to finally deal with our city hall and either fix it or put it out of its misery. The EWEB master planning will come into play, as will the riverfront connection to our downtown. All planning must be integrated.
5. We'll work to organize and adequately fund our public safety services including police, fire and ambulance services. This should include new opportunities to partner with the county and to plan in the context of our work to become a Human Rights City.
6. We'll complete our climate and energy action plan and food security plans and escalate our commitment to reducing global warming.
7. We'll support public transit and the EmX West Eugene corridor development and its utmost importance to achieving broader community goals.
8. We'll aim for platinum for our bicycle system now that we have achieved gold standard.
9. We'll make certain "Eugene Counts" in every respect.

So, promises are being kept and things are getting done. Services for our community are important whether they be for roads, parks, culture and recreation, neighborhood organizations, municipal planning and economic development, public safety, our judicial system or wastewater management. People are working hard as employees and volunteers, as committee and commission members – because we believe it is important, because we love this place and because we know we can and do make a difference.

I'm proud of our staff for their commitment to providing excellent service and keeping people employed. I'm proud of their efforts to create better communication with all parts of the community. I'm proud of their support for our council's goals and moving our city forward, even in these hard times. None of this is perfect of course, but the effort has been unswerving and focused. Eugene's management team and employees are excellent and care about our community.

Our city council has worked hard, through their leadership, their hours of meetings and their dedication to the needs of their wards. Ultimately, they have immense and bottom-line responsibility for the well-being and future of Eugene.

We all love Eugene and intend that our children and their children and their children will love it and be stewards of it for generations to come. 2010 is the beginning of all our tomorrows and there is much to do.

This brings to mind three quotes from Mahatma Gandhi:

“We must become the change we want to see.”

“Honest differences are often the sign of healthy progress.”

“The future depends on what we do in the present.”

Welcome 2010! We are ready to move forward.